

# Look Westward, Natus!

*or*

## The Russian Steamroller Gets Steamrolled

### A PAX BALTICA Session Report

*Being a record of the play session executed 8 September in the year of our Lord 2009 at Fun City in Chelsea, New York City.*

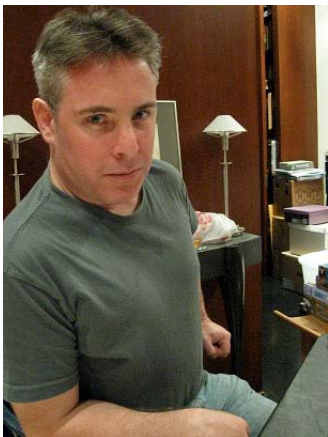
PAX BALTICA is a two-player Grand Strategy Game covering the entire Great Northern War and recreates the intriguing conflict that is often considered a side-show of the War of Spanish Succession. Yet the conflict probably have had greater impact on Europe's political, cultural and social developments than the latter.

The game includes five different scenarios with varying play time of two to eight hours depending on scenario. The units in the game are high quality colored wooden blocks which give great flexibility for game play and limited intelligence. The four-color map is divided into provinces which you have to conquer in order to take control over a country and to eventually defeat the enemy. Playable nations include Sweden, Russia, Denmark, Saxony, and the Ottoman Empire.

PAX BALTICA was published in Sweden earlier this year by Three Crowns, and is now in development for republication at GMT. The rules used herein are subject to change, and currently consist of a cosmetic rewrite of the 1.1 ruleset available now from Three Crowns.

PAX BALTICA is currently available for preorder via GMT's P500 system.

#### **PARTICIPANTS:**



*Nate "the Great" Merchant as Pjotr I of Russia*



*Dan "Charles" Raspler as Karl XII of Sweden*

*Scott "the Pedantic" DiBerardino*  
commentator and general nuisance  
(i.e. Developer of the GMT edition of PAX BALTICA)  
[not pictured]

Fortified by an excellent white port brought by Nate, and after getting the players up to speed, we launched right into the Grand Campaign setup, starting in 1700. Historically, Saxony, Russia, and Denmark had formed an offensive alliance (the Coalition) at the start of the year in an attempt to capitalize on the recent accession of the eighteen-year-old king Karl XII to the throne of Sweden. The game opens in Autumn 1700, just after a lightning campaign by Sweden has knocked Denmark out of the war, while Saxon and Russian armies have invaded the Swedish Baltic provinces.

Dan, as Sweden, begins with an automatic three actions by scenario rule, loading four regiments onto the Swedish fleets in the South Baltic Sea, while moving one block from Skåne and two blocks from Västergötland to Svealand.

Nate, as the Coalition, responds by moving two Russian blocks from Ingermanland to Livland to support the Saxons there, while the remaining two Russian blocks (armies) successfully take Narva by siege. The Swedish replacement level is knocked down 4 RPs by the loss of their garrison, and the Coalition is off to a good start, except for one step loss due to attrition in Livland (the blocks there exceed the forage limit).



Winter 1700 sees both players rolling events (Attrition, which only affects non-native blocks, in two regions – no effect in this case). The turn ends immediately, so both sides settle into winter quarters.

Each new year begins with an Interphase where inactive nations can enter the war and both sides can build new blocks and reinforce on-map blocks with replacements. This is followed by four seasonal turns where most of the action takes place.

Entry rolls for Denmark, the Ottoman Empire, and Ukraine all fail. Sweden builds out its force pool (there wasn't much left to build anyway), placing one block in Skåne and three in Västergötland. The Russians build 1 in Jaroslav, 2 in Moskva, and 1 in Tula. Their Saxon allies build 2 blocks in Lausitz and 3 in Sachsen, but these have a long march through friendly Poland before they can reach the front.

Before that can happen, disaster strikes. In Spring 1701, the Coalition members (Russia and Saxony) must roll on their National Event tables. The Russian event has no effect, but the Saxons are conned into a truce by Swedish diplomacy, and are removed from the board until the start of 1703! This will free Karl XII's hand to fight against Russia without needing to worry about a second front.

The Swedes get two actions. Their fleet moves to the Gulf of Finland, while the two blocks in Estland probe into Ingermanland to confront the Russians there. In the first Battle of Narva, the Russians score three hits and the Swedes fall back to Estland immediately.

In Summer, the tables turn, as Sweden rolls an event (to no effect) and the Russians get three actions. Three Russian blocks from Ingermanland and Livland attack the depleted Swedes in Estland, while a couple of other blocks move up to the front. The Battle of Reval sees the Russians wipe out the Swedes, clearing them from the Baltic. The Russians lose one step to attrition in Ingermanland.

As Summer turns to Autumn, the wheel of fate comes round again – Sweden gets three actions and Russia gets an event (to no effect once more). Dan moves the loaded Swedish fleet to the North Baltic and lands four of his blocks in the now-empty Livland (one takes a step loss from attrition for exceeding forage limits). His three blocks in Svealand board the empty fleets for a second landing force. Another step is lost by the Russians in Ingermanland to attrition.

As Winter arrives, both sides get two actions. Dan moves first and slips his fleets once again into the Gulf of Finland. With the Danes not yet in the war, the Swedes have all the naval mobility they could want. His three transported blocks invade Russian-held Estland. Dan's offensive options are limited, since he cannot retreat by sea from a territory where he does not control the port – and the Russians now own Narva.

Nate sends two Russian blocks from Ingermanland as reinforcements to the 2<sup>nd</sup> Battle of Reval, and two more blocks from Moskva to Novgorod to cover his lines.



The Swedes, nearly all of whom are rated “A” and fire first, score three hits in the battle, and the Russians decide running away is the better part of valor. They split up, one going to Ingermanland, one to Novgorod, and two to Velikaya. One step is lost to attrition in Novgorod, and another in Livland as the Swedes did not move any blocks from there.

After this series of campaigns, the Interphase for year 1702 produces no political surprises – no one enters the war. Dan returns his two destroyed blocks, one to Sweden, and the Estlandska regiment directly to Estland (as they are local troops and deploy there by special rule). Nate takes his Russian replacements largely on the map, but does deploy new blocks in Moskva and Jaroslav.

The Russians move first in the Spring, with three actions to the Swedes' one. They immediately go on the offensive, sending three blocks into Estland as a pinning force, and five blocks (led by the three in Novgorod) into Livland in an attempt to take down the main Swedish force right off the bat.

The resulting Battle of Riga is a mutual slaughter. Every block involved was reduced to one step by the end of the battle, but only one Swedish regiment was eliminated. The Russians scored a devastating seven hits in the first round which evened things up nicely. However, they couldn't clear the territory, and the the attackers retreat to Velikaya and Novgorod at the end of the maximum three combat rounds.

Meanwhile, the demonstration 3<sup>rd</sup> Battle of Reval results in severe losses to the attacking Russians, and they hightail it back to Ingermanland and Tver.

The action remains at a fever pitch in Summer 1702. The Swedes counterattack the depleted Russians by moving pinning forces from Livland to Velikaya and a strike force from Estland to Ingermanlan in an attempt to setup the liberation of Narva.



The 2<sup>nd</sup> Battle of Narva goes Dan's way and the Russians are cleared from Ingermanland. The pinning force sent to Velikaya scurries away to Livland (those "A"-rated blocks again...) and one Russian block regroups to Smolensk for better forage.



With Nate's position precarious, lady luck frowns in the Autumn as the Russians roll an event and Dan's Swedes get three actions again! The event turns out to have no effect, but Dan uses his actions to set up another landing force, reinforce Ingermanland (in preparation for the siege of Narva) and attack Velikaya again. The Russians there retreat to Smolensk with the loss of one regiment and four steps overall in the 2<sup>nd</sup> Battle of Pskov.

The Russian nobility is paralyzed by crisis – Nate rolls another event. The Swedes get three more actions, and Dan uses them to land more troops in the Baltic, shuffle his forces around a bit, and declare siege against Narva, which falls without difficulty. Status quo ante bellum is restored.

In the quiet of the Interphase for 1703, Saxony returns to the game from truce, building two blocks in Lausitz. Still a long ways away... Russia spends all of its RPs reinforcing on-map blocks. Sweden only spends 11 of its 40 RP allotment, returning a local block to Pommern, building one in Svealand, and filling out its on-map forces. Again, no inactive powers decide to join the festivities.



The action picks up right where it left off, as the Russians get three actions in the Spring to sort out their defense before Karl comes crashing into Russian territory. Nate settles on a counterattack in Velikaya, sending five blocks in to clear out the Swedes there. Dan counterpunches by sending four blocks to attack the weakly-held Novgorod.



No real battle is fought for Pskov, as Karl leads his forces back to Livland straight away. The Russians disperse for forage, two blocks to Rjzev, 1 to Smolensk, and 1 to Tver. In Novgorod, however, is cleared of the single defending Russian regiment, and the attacking Swedes regroup 2 blocks to Ingermanland to avoid attrition.

Nate the Great refuses to go down without a fight. In Summer 1703, the Russians get three actions, and he sends three blocks to attack Novgorod. The Swedes contest Velikaya with four blocks, while two more reinforce the defense of Novgorod from Ingermanland.

The 2<sup>nd</sup> Battle of Novogord sees three Russian armies face two Swedish armies, each with some supporting regiments, but both kings are elsewhere. This large battle starts somewhat slowly, the Swedes scoring three hits and taking two in return. The Swedish reinforcements arrive and the tide turns as they together score four hits. The Russians retreat in the face of this assault, two blocks to Moskva and one to Tula. Two of the Swedish blocks regroup to Ingermanland.

The 4<sup>th</sup> Battle of Pskov is a showdown between Peter and Karl with smaller forces. Karl gets the jump and scores four hits right away, and Peter pulls back to avoid capture, retreating to Kaluga. One Swedish

block regroups to Livland, and a Russian block in Moskva takes attrition. The Russians are backed up against the wall of their heartland...

Autumn finds the depleted Russian armies spending all three of their actions for on-map replacements in an attempt to stem the Swedish steamroller. Karl takes the opportunity of the pause to lay siege to Novgorod with three armies, taking the city with ease. The Russian RP level drops by 4.

As Winter approaches, the Swedes press on into Tver with three blocks, and the Russians shore up their other forces with replacements. The Battle of Tver sees both Russian regiments get away depleted, retreating to Smolensk, leaving the field to the invading Swedish armies.



As the calendar ticks over to 1704, the Russian crisis teeters on the precipice... the opportunistic Turks declare war and begin to assemble in Ösi for a campaign in the Ukraine! The Danes smartly sit things out another year.

As the snows recede into Spring, the Swedes seek to put the final nail in the Russian coffin. The Turks march on

Poltava, and it barely falls to their siege. Tver also falls to the Swedes, and Russia replacements take an 8 RP hit (total). The Russians attempt to jump on the Swedish flank at Rjzev, but the Swedes slip away to Novgorod and the Russians disperse to Moskva.



At this point, with the Russians severely on the ropes, the rebuilding Saxon army still in central Germany, and the Swedes poised to march on Moskva, we had to call it a night before your humble chronicler began to pass out from exhaustion.

My most humble thanks to Nate and Dan for giving Pax Baltica a try – it was the first shot at the game for both of them, and after some initial searching moves they seem to have taken it up well. I hope we get to see more play from them in the near future.